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AUTHOR Sargent, John A.

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ABSTRACT

The researcher/author developed, out of necessity as a teacher, an alternative method to teach reading to a classroom containing students with learning disabilities. A study sought to determine whether the "Achieve" reading curriculum is an effective instructional methodology for increasing the reading achievement of seventh-grade students with learning disabilities. If the curriculum is effective, a new way of viewing reading instruction for students with learning disabilities will result. With this new paradigm, the student with learning disabilities will be provided an opportunity to succeed in reading. The specific research question was whether the "Achieve" reading curriculum will increase the reading achievement in a selected seventh-grade special education classroom (n=10) in a Louisiana middle school. Concept/theory based sampling was used. The classroom was observed and interviews were conducted, and qualitative content analysis was conducted to determine if certain patterns or themes were recurring in the data. Data analysis yielded six recurring patterns/themes. Findings suggest that this curriculum increased the reading achievement of middle school students with learning disabilities in one Louisiana classroom. The six themes show why such a conclusion can be reached. The Achieve Reading Curriculum is appended. (Contains 48 references.) (NKA)

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The Achieve Reading Curriculum: A Case Study of Holistic Reading Education for Middle School Special Education Students

By

John A. Sargent

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

A special education resource teacher's life is challenging. Capturing a small portion of the challenge is this poem, written by a "special" educator:

Teachers
Try to fit kids into neat little boxes
With the label "Good Student"
Stamped on top.
But what happens to those kids
Who don't fit the shape of the box?
When the lid is closed,
Sections burst out,
The box unable to contain its contents.
No matter how hard the struggle
The child just won't fit!
Which do we throw out
The box
or the child?
(Furst, 1997)

This poem, written by a fellow special educator provides the premise for this case study. I presume that traditional approaches used with middle school students with learning disabilities may be damaging to the reading development of these students. I maintain these learning difficulties are made worse by some of the learning tasks involved in learning to read.

Many times, the special education child is considered to be somehow "deficient" and is referred to as a problem. Weaver (1994) believes that the fault lies not in the children, but in a system that is failing to prevent the damage in the first place.

Labeling a child as a special needs student by classifying him or her learning disabled only makes the problem worse in establishing an instructional methodology effective for those children.

Weaver (1994) believes that we must recognize that environment in general and education in particular plays a huge part in the initiation, diagnosis, and maintenance of such difficulties.

According to Weaver, (1994) factors located in the environment and factors located within the individual's neurological background influence and enter into a diagnosis of learning disabilities. She states that a person's genetic make-up may result not only from heredity, but also from pre-natal conditions, birth trauma, and postnatal injury. Additionally, she theorizes that a person's neurological functioning and consequent reading/learning behaviors may result not only from his or her genetic make-up, but also from how reading and is conceptualized, taught and assessed. Finally, she states that a person's being diagnosed as learning-disabled results not only from his or her overt reading/learning behaviors and achievement but also from how learning disabilities are defined. In other words, the concept of learning disabilities reflects our idea of reading and learning and assessment as much or more than the actual neurological functioning of the individual.

Many reading programs attempt to teach skills by breaking the skills down into little bits and pieces that have little meaning for the student. When these students become frustrated by encountering work that has little meaning for them they often tune out and drop out of school. The "Achieve" reading curriculum attempts to bridge that gap by providing a holistic reading program for students with learning disabilities.

During my first year of teaching students with learning disabilities I was confronted with a troubling fact. Often, in one class, reading abilities spanning 12 grades were present. How to reach and teach these students was my motivation for the development of the "Achieve" reading curriculum.

According to Baumann and Duffy (2001) one of the most effective methods to examine the efficacy of classroom programs is a teacher-researcher study. They argue that the typical teacher researcher identifies a problem or question and then decides to initiate a classroom inquiry.

This intrinsic case study follows that pattern. This researcher developed an alternative method to teach reading to a classroom containing students with learning disabilities. The curriculum was developed out of necessity. Mohr (1996) developed the concept of teachers adjusting the curriculum to fit their classes and then researching the result.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is the need to determine whether the "Achieve" reading curriculum is an effective instructional methodology for increasing the reading achievement of seventh grade students with learning disabilities. If this curriculum is effective, a new way of viewing reading instruction for students with learning disabilities will result. With this new paradigm, the student with learning disabilities will be provided an opportunity to succeed in reading.

Research Question

Will the "Achieve" reading curriculum increase the reading achievement in a selected seventh grade special education classroom in a 6-8 middle school in northwestern Louisiana?

Definition of Terms

Achieve Reading Curriculum: A curriculum modeled on holistic/constructivist principles, which are explained in the theoretical framework section. It is designed to teach and explore reading by utilizing books the students choose. Additionally, an analytical approach to phonics instruction is inherent in this framework.

Real reading tasks that are centered on each learner's abilities become a focus of instruction. Few worksheets are present and assessment is guided by a portfolio approach.

Special Education Student: A student that is classified according to state and federal guidelines as having one or more disabilities. This study specifically addresses students with learning disabilities.

Learning Disabled: A child with a disability in receiving, organizing, or expressing information. These children are of average intelligence but have difficulty listening, thinking, speaking, reading, writing or doing arithmetic and this results in a significant discrepancy between ability and achievement (Weaver,1996).

Reading achievement: a construct consisting of subjective observations of word attack skills, comprehension, oral reading fluency, and silent sustained reading (Sargent, 1998).

CHAPTER TWO

Review of the Literature

The purpose of this case study was to determine if the Achieve reading curriculum was effective in increasing the reading achievement of students with learning disabilities in a seventh grade special education classroom in northwestern Louisiana. Therefore this literature review begins by concentrating on what may be a problem in addressing the needs of special education learners. It asks the reader to begin the process of a paradigm shift from a behavioristic/reductionistic way of viewing instruction to a constructivisit/holistic approach.

With that as a backdrop, this literature review examines what makes up a holistic approach to reading instruction. Additionally, holistic reading instruction for special needs learners will be examined.

Holistic Reading Instruction

Holistic reading is an outlook on education, a philosophy of education, a belief system about education. It is an educational theory that is research based (Harste,1989). This literature review examines the research on holistic reading education by looking at three different kinds of research: First, the components of holistic reading practices are examined; second, research comparing children's learning in holistic reading classrooms with other, more traditional classrooms; finally, research looking at teaching phonics in the whole language or holistic classroom is scrutinized.

Components of holistic reading practices. Holistic language education is a "constructivist" view of learning with particular emphasis on the development of literacy. Constructivism believes that human beings develop concepts through their own intellectual interactions and actions with the world.

Learning is not viewed as passive, but as an active continuing process. Developing reading skills is easier when learners are presented with authentic reading material (Weaver, Gillmeister-Krause, & Vento-Zogby, 1996). In the U.S., the beginning of holistic language is traced back to the middle of the1970's when Kenneth Goodman and others' insights into reading as a psycholinguistic approach gained recognition (Weaver, 1994).

According to Weaver (1990), acceptance of learners means that all learners are accepted regardless of their cultural or socio-economic background or other characteristics or labels. Likewise, in holistic reading classrooms "acceptance of learners" also means that holistic teachers develop the classroom environment and the curriculum for and with the students, to meet their needs and excite them in learning about what interests them, as well as covering curriculum guidelines.

Edelsky, Altwerger, & Flores (1991) conclude that students in holistic reading classes are not kept busy doing readiness activities, in preparation for later reading and writing but instead are given the support they need to read whole texts from the beginning. Holistic reading teachers have discovered from their classroom experiences that virtually all children can learn to read whole texts, even those so called special education students who before were sent to self contained classes or resource rooms.

Reading skills are taught through minilessons and conferences, in the context of students' reading. As an example: phonics is taught mainly through discussion and activities derived from texts the students read and reread with the teacher, and through writing the sounds they hear in words. Skills are taught when students are engaged in real life tasks (Watson, 1989).

Poplin (1988, p.405) lists 12 basic principles of the constructivist/holistic model of reading education. They include the following points:

1. The whole of the learned experience is greater than the sum of its parts.
2. The interactions of the learned experience transform both the individual's spiral (whole) and the single experience (part).
3. The learner's spiral of knowledge is self-regulating and self-preserving.
4. All people are learners, always actively searching for meaning and constructing new meanings.
5. The best predictor of what and how someone will learn is what they already know.
6. Learning often proceeds from whole to part to whole.
7. Errors are critical to learning.
8. Learners learn best from experiences about what they are passionately interested and involved.
9. The development of accurate forms follows the emergence of function and meaning.
10. Learners learn best from people they trust.
11. Experiences connected to the learner's present knowledge and interest are learned best.
12. Integrity is a primary characteristic of the human mind.

Comparative research on learning. Children in holistic language classrooms seem to develop greater ability to use phonics knowledge more effectively than children in more traditional classrooms where skills are practiced in isolation. In Freepon's study (1991), the skills group attempted to sound out words more than twice as often as the others, but the literature-based group was more successful in doing so. The literature group had a 53% success rate compared with a 32% success rate for the skills group. Based on this eveidence, the literature-based children were more successful because they made better use of phonics along with other information and cues.

A 1990 study by Stice and Betrand focused on emergent literacy of at risk children. The study involved fifty children over a two-year period. The study concluded that children in holistic classrooms were more aware of alternative strategies for dealing with problems, such as particular words. Furthermore, holistic language children appeared to focus more on meaning and the communicative nature of language.

Likewise, the children in holistic language classrooms seemed to be developing greater independence in both reading and writing. Finally, standardized test scores (Stanford Achievement Test) of children in holistic classrooms were slightly better than the scores of children in traditional classrooms.

Children in holistic reading classrooms seem to develop more strategies for dealing with problems in reading. In the study by Stice and Betrand (1990), students typically developed six strategies for dealing with problem words, while students in traditional classrooms described only three.

Freepon and McIntrye (1999) in a recent qualitative study showed that children from a constructivist based whole language classroom read far longer than did the children from a skills based classroom. Additionally, the level of courage, persistence, and application of reading strategies were different: the constructivist-based children had greater breadth in knowing what being a reader encompasses and a greater willingness to try. The authors assert that this difference would not be captured on standardized measures of reading. Additionally, similar results were obtained in relation to classroom oral reading proficiency.

A 1999 study by Cantrell concerning Kentucky's Educational Reform Act, showed that students from classrooms where teachers used a meaning centered holistic approach achieved higher reading and writing scores on the Stanford Achievement Test, providing evidence that holistic reading education does increase scores on a standardized test.

In a 1999 article by Daniels and Zemelman, the authors present conclusive evidence that whole language/holistic instruction works. In this article, they review over 60 years of research demonstrating the effectiveness of this approach to beginning

reading instruction.

The authors found that fifteen studies validated the comparative effectiveness, at a statistically significant level, of one or another element used in whole language/holistic reading classrooms. Additionally, five studies showed significantly higher test scores in broader whole language/holistic reading classrooms than in traditional classrooms.

In contrast, one study showed no difference between whole language/holistic reading and traditional classrooms; two smaller case studies showed the effectiveness of whole language/holistic models of reading instruction. Daniels and Zemmelman (1999) encourage the opponents of whole language/holistic instruction to examine the research and conclude that this form of instruction is powerful for the beginning reader.

With the dawn of the 1990's some prominent researchers have argued for the teaching of phonics intensively and systematically (Adams, 1990; Stahl, 1992). Many others in the media commonly imply that phonics is all children need to know in order to learn to read.

Teaching phonics in a whole language/holistic language classroom. In a recent study of how phonics is taught in a whole language environment (Dahl & Scharer, 2000), researchers demonstrated that phonological awareness, phonemic awareness, and phonemic segmentation instruction make up just over a third of instructional time. They documented that numerous opportunities existed during the class's shared reading and writing time for instruction regarding vowel sounds and consonants. The data analysis revealed that teachers taught phonics strategies by giving procedural explanations about how to use the letter-sound concepts they were learning. In all of the classrooms observed, phonics instruction was woven into the daily whole language activities. Long writing periods provided the opportunities for the children to deal with the phonics concepts. Receiving help from the teacher and other students was a common occurrence.

Teachers conducted phonics instruction by keeping track of the progress students were making and used various continuing assessments to help plan individual instruction. Writing samples, checklists, reading logs, and running records were used.

In a 1999 article, Moustafa argued for a whole to part phonics instruction approach. This type of phonetic instruction is often practiced in the holistic reading classroom. She contends that whole-to-part phonics instruction differs from traditional parts-to-whole phonics instruction in several ways. First, it grounds instruction in letter-sound correspondences in meaningful contexts and it builds on spoken language instruction they already understand. Additionally, it teaches letter-sound correspondences (onsets, rimes, and syllables) using units of spoken language familiar to children. She also believes that this type of instruction is explicit, systematic, and extensive.

Beringer, Abbott, Zook, Ogier, Lemos-Britton, and Brooksher (1999) found a connectionist approach to be effective for increasing reading achievement. In this study, a teacher modeling spelling and sound relationships to beginning readers was effective in teaching students to recognize and spell words without explicit phonics rules being taught.

Holistic reading teachers use explicit help in developing phonemic awareness, phonics knowledge and decoding skills (Weaver, 1994). By teaching phonics through reading, minilessons, and writing, holistic reading teachers help students develop phonics knowledge in the context of books they enjoy reading and the stories they enjoy writing (Stahl & Kuhn, 1995).

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Bartoli and Botel in a1988 study viewed an obsessive testing of trivia, fragmented skills-oriented curricula that provide more of the same skills work in which students do not excel, and special remedial programs that typically provide more of the same de-contextualized skills work as problematic solutions to improve reading. They believe these approaches frequently isolate students from their peers and from the authentic reading and writing that their peers may be doing.

Holistic Reading for Special Education Middle School Students

This researcher has identified four areas of research that pertain to the special needs learner and holistic reading instruction. First, research discussing traditional approaches used for reading instruction for special needs learners. Second, research focusing on the needs of special learners. Third, research focusing on special needs student preferences for a reading curriculum. Finally, noteworthy practices for special education students are presented.

Traditional approaches. Vaughn, Moody, and Schumn (1998) demonstrated that reading instruction in the typical resource room for special education students was terrible. Most of the teachers (11 of 14) used whole group instruction followed by independent seatwork. Additionally, only a few of the teachers provided individualized differential work to complete. In nine classrooms, all students, regardless of ability were asked to read the same book. Ten of the 14 teachers identified whole language as the central approach they used to teach reading. They stated that students were more motivated and enjoyed the skills taught in context in a whole language environment. Only three teachers instructed their students in word decoding skills. The teaching of comprehension strategies was non-existent. During 41 observations, only one instance of teaching comprehension strategies occurred.

Overall, Vaughn et al. (1998) state that reading instruction in the resource room is a broken promise because of its failure to provide an individualized reading program. Furthermore, other broken promises exist for special education teachers who were guaranteed the time and resources necessary for instructing these students.

Phinney (1988) also questioned the effectiveness of traditional approaches used to instruct students labeled "learning disabled". She noted the value of evaluating the individual processing styles of students and of planning instruction accordingly instead of forcing the students to be in instructional programs that prevent them form using their strengths. Phinney points out that instruction is often based on an analysis of language with the assumption that the smaller the visual or phonic unit a students has to deal with, the easier it is to learn. She states that based on recent research, today's educators know the opposite is true.

Lowe & Lowe (1992, p.14) discuss the usefulness of holistic reading instruction for at risk readers. At risk readers are defined as those who exhibit difficulty with word attack skills, have poor vocabulary attainment, and do not understand what they read. In this article they discuss the typical reading instruction for at risk readers. They believe it consists of workbooks, skill exercises, and less challenging tasks than are given to their more literate peers. Questioning this approach for at risk readers, they describe the holistic reading classroom and its practices as being just what the special learner needs in order to succeed.

Student needs. A study by MacInnis and Hemming (1995) linked the needs of students with learning disabilities to a whole language/holistic curriculum. They demonstrated that whole language is a holistic curriculum based on constructivist

principles.

It is a curriculum that is child centered because it places the needs of the child as the overriding factor. It allows children to take control of their learning and to relate it to previous knowledge. It is a language-based curriculum that empowers the child to become a reader and writer. Each child is allowed to progress as quickly as its ability allows. Therefore, it is an inclusive curriculum, which does not separate learning disabled students into separate rooms for skills based instruction. The positive feelings each child attains because of this inclusion promotes positive attitudes towards learning. MacInnis and Hemming (1995) also found that whole language/holisitic reading education encourages social interaction, which requires learners to interact with each other in a supportive environment. A whole to part relationship encourages learner exploration of the language. Skills are taught when the child needs them in the totality of the language.

The article by Lowe & Lowe (1992) lists items they consider vital for at risk reader success. First, teacher modeling of active engaged reading must be present in the learning environment. Second, students must be provided with choices to read and the responsibility for choosing this material rests with the student. Third, the holistic reading environment must be an engaging, literate environment that promotes literacy. Next, students must be provided with time to read silently. Lowe and Lowe further suggest that an incentive program be developed for promoting this silent reading. Finally, they suggest that writing activities take place along side of the reading activities because the development of reading and writing activities take place together.

Hosking and Terberg (1998) have examined what it takes for middle school students to be successful in literacy programs. Their research focused on a student-centered environment that enabled the learner to be successful.

A student-centered environment empowers the learner to make responsible choices and allows the student to be in control of his or her learning. The curriculum they advocate includes many of the types of activities that as a matter of course take place in a holistic language classroom and are the same activities that promote the growth and learning of special education students

The teacher is viewed as a mediator and a facilitator to guide and provide support to the learner when necessary. Flexibility is the operative word. Mini lessons are provided when needed to address needed skills and to help learners build the critical skills necessary for success. A whole language curriculum holds promise for meeting the needs of the learning disabled student. It expands the learning opportunities for all students

In a recent study of stress for learning disabled middle school students Wenz-Gross and Siperstein (1998) reported that students with learning problems described more academic stressors, more peer stressors, and more stressors related to teachers and classroom management. These students reported they had trouble keeping up with the class work, trouble learning new things, and trouble following the teacher's directions. Additionally, they had more trouble than their peers in making new friends, being bothered by older kids, and being afraid of weapons or violence. Students with learning problems differed in their perception of social support. They believed they received less support form their peers, but more support from adults. Students with learning problems experienced a poorer adjustment and a lower self-esteem. A holistic reading curriculum built on each learner's strengths rather than weakness may be just the segue the special

education or at risk reader needs to become less stressed and therefore more successful in school activities.

Wenz-Gross and Siperstein (1998) conclude that students with learning problems are a group at risk in middle school. They suggest these students need assistance with managing the academic, developmental, and social demands placed on them. A holistic reading curriculum provides assistance and motivation for these students. For the first time, they are free to become readers in their own right (Weaver, 1996).

In a 2000 article by Sanacore, the author argues that promoting the lifetime love of reading should be one of the most important goals in middle school. He states that middle school students should, through pleasurable reading have the opportunity to apply skills to meaningful contexts, build general and specific knowledge, experience fluency with connected text, and do this in the context of meaningful texts. Sanacore asserts that whole language and holistic reading education are being bashed from the proponents of the standards based initiatives. Furthermore, he supports middle school as a time of exploration and a time to discover things about the world and the self. Particularly for at risk and special needs youngsters this period of exploration and self-discovery is crucial to their development. This development is bolstered by holistic reading curriculum.

Showers, Joyce, Scanlon, and Schnaubelt (1998) have created a reading program based on holistic principles for adolescents who enter high school two or more years below grade level in reading. Their program was significant in increasing the reading achievement of these at risk adolescents. At the end of one semester in this program, students had increased over a year's grade level in reading as measured by the Abbreviated Stanford Achievement Test.

In a 1998 study by Rankhorn, England, Collins, Lockavitch, and Algozzine, a

holistic reading program that employed age appropriate materials, promoted independence in reading, and used repetition, immediate performance feedback, and a consistent approach increased the grade equivalent score by nine to 18 months on the Woodcock Johnson Test of Achievement over a six month period. At the conclusion of the study by Rankhorn et al. (1998) 31 percent of the students showed severe reading discrepancies, a 50 percent drop from the beginning of the program.

In holistic reading classrooms students have many opportunities to read independently and often to choose what they will read. Sometimes, choices are inhibited by the curriculum. For example, students may be able to choose from a number of books, but all of the options must relate to the American Revolution or to some other topic. The important point here is the student gets to choose. Many times the student is free to choose what they want to read. Even the least proficient reader is treated as a reader and is expected to read during this time of independent reading.

Widdowson and Dixon (1996) demonstrated the positive effects that teacher modeling of silent sustained reading has on student silent reading. For both low and average achieving readers, substantial increases occurred in on-task behavior following the introduction of concurrent modeling by the teacher. At risk and special needs youngsters benefit for this form of teacher modeling. In a holistic reading environment both the teacher and student engage in a learning process together with modeling as an integral part demonstrated by the teacher.

Student preferences. In a qualitative study by Swartz and Hendricks (2000), the researchers found that special needs students preferred horror stories, mystery stories, and action adventure books in that order.

Additionally, R.L.Stine, the author of the Goosebumps series, was selected as the favorite author of five of the students while four others chose Stephen King. Other authors mentioned were: Marc Brown, Matt Christopher, and L.M. Montgomery. Very few students were concerned with the author's writing style. Approximately one third of the students stated they would select a book based on a favorite character. Also, one third of the students described that the ability to relate to a character was important to them. Fifteen students stated that cover illustrations led them to select certain books.

Eighteen students said they read the back of the book summaries before selecting a book. Another important factor in book selection was an appealing title as 14 students stated that this led them to select certain books. Sixteen students liked shorter books because they did not lose interest in the books. Books based on popular movies or television shows were popular as 11 students chose books for this reason. Some of the students (16) selected books based on a friend's recommendation. Finally, most of the responses indicated that students used a variety of strategies for selecting books. The researchers concluded that students with special needs are not so different and want to enjoy the same books as typically developing children.

Worthy, Moorman, and Turner (1999) demonstrated the overwhelming top two preferences for middle school readers were scary stories and cartoons and comics. The availability for the most popular types of materials students read is limited in the typical school. The reasons are wide-ranging. When Goosebumps was stocked in the library, the books would often remain checked out. Popular magazines easily walked off by themselves and were not replaced. Some librarians and teachers expressed the view that they wanted the students to read "real" books.

Worthy et al.(1999) findings support the view that there is an ever-increasing gap between students' preferences and materials that schools provide and recommend.

The authors believe the best answer in motivating kids to read is as simple as encouraging them to follow their interests and providing books that reach those interests in the reading classroom. This researcher believes the holistic reading approach allows for the freedom of choice and preference finding the typical student needs to be motivated to read.

Cole (1998) has found that beginner oriented texts for the emergent and struggling reader during independent reading time may be just the segue that allows that reader to experience success. In this study, reluctant readers in an eighth grade middle school classroom were motivated to read by the freedom of choice inherent in independent reading time. Cole found that once this choice was allowed, students' motivation transferred to more traditional types of reading that might be found in a more traditional eighth grade class. Additional research by Harmon (1998) supports this observation in a middle school classroom. Furthermore, she discusses how vocabulary development improves as a result of having time for independent reading in a literature based middle school classroom.

Horn (2000) demonstrated that when students are allowed to freely share literature with their classmates many unmotivated learners opened up. Her "Reader of the Day" in which selected students gave book talks on a book they read promoted students to interact more with their class. Additionally, this interaction enabled the students to make choices they valued regarding personal reading selections. Consequently, students were more motivated to read when free choice of reading material was part of the curriculum.

In a 1998 article by Cassady, wordless books were used as a tool to encourage and motivate reluctant readers in a middle school classroom. In this study, the teacher led a

group of middle school students in story development by using wordless books as their basis for the story. This technique motivated the reluctant middle school reader and demonstrates what a powerful tool wordless books can be in boosting the growth of reluctant readers.

Holistic reading teachers are discovering that perhaps the best way to develop students' reading strategies as well as their understanding and appreciation of literature is through discussion, particularly intensive small group discussion. In these discussion groups everyone can share reactions to the literature, make connections to their own lives, discuss literary elements such as characterization, symbol, and theme, main idea, and summary. Group discussion enriches understanding because the group as a unit constructs meaning. The members of the group may discuss the same book or different ones read by each member (Weaver, 1994).

According to Roskos, Risko, and Vukelich (1998) good conversation and discussion are effective and sound methodologies for the conveyance of ideas. Students must be given the opportunity to discuss the reading before any true understanding can take place. This discussion makes it easier for the students to cognitively process the ideas put forth in the reading and to gain an appreciation of what points the author was trying to make.

Worthy (1998) discusses how to use book talks to motivate reluctant middle school readers. Her article suggests three points of advice for middle school teachers. First, let the students choose the books they read for class. Second, let students talk to their friends about what they like to read. Third, obtain some good books and other literary materials for your classroom. She states that students will be motivated to read and discuss if you follow the three suggestions listed above.

Gaskins (1998) believes that teaching at-risk and delayed readers involves more than just good reading instruction. In her article she states several reasons why her students learn to read. First, her students read lots of books and discuss what they read with the teacher and with other students. Second, students are taught about words using implicit phonics. Third, they are taught how to learn and the use of productive strategies across the curriculum in a holistic framework. Finally, the students are taught to take charge of their own personal learning style and motivation.

Notable practices. Weaver, (1994) lists the following practices as being especially notable for special education students: First, special education students are treated as capable and developing; second, the learner's strengths are emphasized; third, learners' unique learning abilities and strengths are valued; fourth, the students' needs and interests help guide the development of the curriculum; fifth, assessment is based less on standardized tests and more on each student's individual growth during the assessment period.

This growth is measured by how well the student progressed towards goals that were established for him or her during the assessment period. Finally, the teacher supports the learning of all students, by developing a supportive and self-esteem enhancing classroom atmosphere. In this atmosphere, the student is able to make responsible choices and to take responsibility for their work.

Summary

This literature review first examined what makes up a holistic approach to reading instruction. From the research examined it was determined that its origins are research based, and the approach primarily relies on a constructivist view of learning that emphasizes active rather than passive learning. Additionally, the 12 steps of the holistic/constructivist as detailed by Poplin (1988) were listed.

Recent research on holistic education showed that students in holistic classrooms do as well or better on standardized reading tests and subtests. Additionally, the students in these classrooms seem to develop a greater ability to use phonics knowledge effectively than students in more traditional classrooms where skills are practiced in isolation. Phonics instruction takes place routinely in a holistic classroom, primarily by a whole to part method rather than part to whole. Recent research detailing the effectiveness of whole to part instruction was examined.

The research surrounding holistic reading and language arts instruction for special education middle school students was also examined. Specifically, research investigating the traditional approaches for reading instruction for special needs learners was studied. Next, the needs of special learners and their preferences in reading instruction was examined. Numerous studies were cited that highlight the parts of a holistic reading program. Finally, five practices listed by Weaver (1994) as being especially notable for special needs learners were presented.

Overall, holistic reading instruction can be considered an effective instructional methodology for special education students. The student becomes in charge of his or her learning and is invited to join a community of learners in the study of reading.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

The literature review clearly implied that holistic reading instruction is an effective methodology for special needs learners. In order to determine if the Achieve reading curriculum is an effective approach for increasing the reading achievement of seventh grade middle school students with learning disabilities this researcher conducted an intrinsic case study using teacher research in one middle school classroom in northwest Louisiana.

Teacher as researcher (Baumann & Duffy, 2001) is an accepted method of inquiry into classroom-based practices. Furthermore, teacher research can be defined as systematic intentional inquiry by teachers into their own school and classroom environment (Lytle & Cochran-Smith, 1990).

Additionally, Baumann and Duffy in a 2001 article state the following: (a) teacher researchers have an emic perspective; (b) they mix theory and practice while teaching within their own classroom worlds; (c) teacher research is pragmatic and goal oriented; and (d) teacher research involves disciplined inquiry.

Setting

The setting for this case study was a 6^{th} -8^{th} grade middle school in northwestern Louisiana. The school is part of a district of approximately 47,000 students and 6,000 employees. The school is racially diverse, with an ethnic composition of approximately 55% Caucasian and 44% African American, and 1% other. Roughly, 708 students currently attend. 56% of the students receive a free or reduced lunch.

Site

The site for this case study was a seventh grade special education classroom. Students were assigned to the classroom because they were not achieving up to their potential in the regular school environment. State of Louisiana guidelines were used by the parish special education services in assigning students to the special education classroom. Most of the students are two to five years below grade level in reading skills.

Participants

The participants in this case study were 10 seventh grade special education students classified as learning disabled by State of Louisiana guidelines. Additionally, this researcher filled the role of teacher researcher (Baumann & Duffy, 2001).

Procedure

The population for this case study consisted of students in a seventh grade self-contained special education classroom at a middle school in northwestern Louisiana. Purposeful sampling strategies were conducted. Specifically, concept theory based sampling was used because the purpose of the case study was to determine if the Achieve reading curriculum was an effective methodology for increasing the reading achievement of special education middle school students (McMillian & Schumacher, 1997)

The classroom observed was implementing the Achieve reading curriculum for its students and thus was appropriate for this case study. As stated in the participant's section, 10 students took part. The study took place during a 10-hour observation and interview period between April 9th and April 27th 2001. Research efforts were focused on observations made by the teacher-researcher, reading skill questions posed to the students, and work samples of the phonics study section of the lesson.

Weaver (1994) states that improvement in reading and writing skills takes place according to each child's potential when a holistic approach is used.

Additionally, she states that improvement in these skills can be seen if interviews are conducted, observations made, and writing samples are taken over the course of an instructional unit or time frame.

The validity of this design was increased by the use of low inference descriptors, the use of a teacher researcher, and the seeking of negative cases or discrepant data. Researcher bias was reduced by the use of a field log by the researcher, and a peer debriefer (McMillian & Schumacher, 1997).

Data Analysis

Qualitative content analysis was conducted to determine if certain patterns or themes were recurring in the data. (Simpson & Nist, 1997). Data analysis yielded six recurring patterns and themes. First, the method and setting influenced the reading process in a strong way. Second, various reading engagement behaviors took place signifying the students willingness to read. Third, some reading disengagement behaviors were also present. Fourth, various interactions between the teacher and student(s) and between students were present. Fifth, student responses to various reading skill questions posed by the participant-observer indicated various levels of reading knowledge. Sixth, students' use of words discussed during the phonics study section of the Achieve curriculum were analyzed.

From these six recurring patterns an examination was made to determine if the Achieve curriculum increased the reading achievement of students taking part in this study. In order to answer that question this researcher examined the six recurring themes/patterns in relation to the following categories of inquiry.

First, did an improvement in vocabulary understanding occur?

In order to determine this, this researcher looked at the students' use of words discussed during the phonics fun section of the lesson. Second, were students able to answer various skill questions on self-selected reading material? Third, were reading engagement behaviors facilitated by the use of this holistic curriculum?

Triangulation of data was achieved by referring to the observations, the students' answers to the various skill questions, and an examination of the writing responses to the phonics study section.

CHAPTER FOUR

Analysis and Interpretation

This case study sought to answer the following research question: Will the Achieve reading curriculum increase the reading achievement in a selected seventh grade special education classroom in a 6-8 middle school in northwestern Louisiana?

A determination was made by qualitative content analysis that six recurring patterns for coding data were occurring. First, the method and setting influenced the reading process in a strong way. Second, various reading engagement behaviors took place signifying the students' willingness to read. Third, some reading disengagement behaviors were also present. Fourth, various interactions between the teacher and student(s) and between students were present. Fifth, student responses to various reading skill questions posed by the teacher-researcher indicated various levels of reading knowledge. Sixth, students' written use of words discussed during the phonics fun section of the Achieve curriculum was analyzed.

Method and Setting

The classroom where the Achieve reading curriculum is used is designed for reading. From the data for observation one, the description of the room facilitates easy access for students to reading material. Over 550 books on various reading levels are present for student use. The room arrangement is straightforward with desks arranged in a circular pattern to assist interaction. Around the room there are 23 charts displayed of words covered during the phonics study section of the previous lessons.

The first part of each lesson is silent reading. A reading skill is posted on the front chalkboard. This skill will be the focus of skill conferences conducted by the teacher and aide. Students are expected to enter into the room, select a folder containing previous reading material, a reading log, and various other important papers.

As detailed in the observation data for day one, after the silent reading portion of the Achieve curriculum is complete, and several reading conferences have been held with selected students, the class transitions into the phonics study section of the lesson. This section of the lesson focuses on developing vocabulary and analytical phonetic skills. The students search for words to develop a class chart based on a letter cluster(s) or a higher level thinking association for the day. Each student is expected to contribute to the class discussion of words. A class chart of words is constructed from various words that the students contribute. Anywhere from eight to twelve words are examined during each class session. Next, the students are expected to write a response to any or some of the words displayed on the class chart. The students are expected to use words discussed during this section of the lesson correctly during their written response. If enough time is left, the students volunteer their written responses for class discussion and oral reading practice.

Reading Engagement Behaviors

During the data analysis it became apparent that various reading engagement behaviors were occurring in selected students. Reading engagement behaviors allow the student to become centered in the reading process. They make him or her more comfortable with reading. Reading engagement behaviors were present and demonstrated by the students during all of their observation periods. During the first observation all students entered the room and quickly obtained their folders and began

reading. While this may seem insignificant, it demonstrates these students like the reading process.

Other behaviors designed to make oneself comfortable throughout the silent reading time were displayed. For example, Steve had a habit of reclining in his chair and Molly would often laugh out loud, but they were reading. Other students like Diane would move their lips silently to ease their reading. Some students like Doug and Jennifer would lower their head on the desk. Despite this, they would continue reading. This was evident during the first hour of observation.

Reading engagement behaviors continued to be demonstrated during the rest of the observation periods. Many of these actions consisted of body movements. For example, George would put his head down on the desk and read. Steve tapped his foot in relation to his page turning. Randy moved his head up and down continually while reading.

Additional reading engagement behaviors became apparent during each of the observation periods. Randy made large swaying motions with his upper body. Both Diane and Joe would put their heads down and read, often fooling me into thinking they were asleep.

Sometimes students would select very low level reading material. This researcher believes this made them comfortable. Therefore, this researcher is including this behavior in reading engagement. One of this researcher's main purposes was to instill in each student a confidence in his or her ability to read. This researcher asserts we want to become better at the things we gain positive reinforcement from. By selecting low-level readers, some of my students gain the positive reinforcement in reading they sorely need.

As an example, during each observational period, Steve, Joe, Randy, and Michael

selected high interest low-level readers to read. Additionally, Jennifer, Molly, and Diane selected these types of books also.

Most students transitioned and became engaged rapidly when the class moved into a different section of the lesson. After the silent reading time, the class would move into searching for words that contained the letter cluster or association for the day. Occasionally, students would think of words containing the cluster instead of using their dictionaries to search for words. George used this approach frequently. Steve, Diane, Molly, Jennifer, and Anthony would locate many different kinds of words to discuss on a consistent basis throughout the observations. This researcher believes that students like to find and discuss new and unique words and this is demonstrated by the data and student writings to the words discussed in class.

During most of the observations, the students would write enthusiastically after the class discussion during the phonics study section of the lesson. This behavior is indicated by the raw data concerning the students' writing. Many of the students became skillful at writing using the words generated by the phonics study section of the lesson. Molly, Diane, Steve, Jennifer, Kevin, George, and Tommy showed a fine capability to write.

Reading Disengagement Behaviors

While this researcher believes that reading engagement behaviors were more prevalent during the observational period, some reading disengagement behaviors did take place. Most of the time, these behaviors manifested themselves as ways to delay reading during the silent reading time. Only occasionally, did any reading disengagement behaviors occur during the phonics study section of the lesson.

During most of the observation periods, two students, George and Randy, were responsible for the majority of the reading disengagement behaviors displayed. Both

students would try different means to delay their silent reading. Only occasionally did their behaviors disrupt the class. Their reading disengagement behaviors were displayed by actions like spending lots of time at the bookcases, staring into space, and continually finding diverse reasons to leave their seat. Randy would often request to go to the office for various reasons. This researcher believes that Randy did not like reading and would try these diversions to escape the silent reading requirement.

One other student in the first hour class, Joe, a child with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder displayed reading disengagement behavior. Most of the time he would delay by asking to go to the restroom.

Other students displayed few reading disengagement behaviors. Occasionally, a student would ask to go to the sickroom as evidenced by Kevin during hour two of the observation period. This researcher believes the maturity level of the seventh grade students helped in few reading disengagement behaviors being displayed. Doug displayed some staring into space on several occasions. Diane often entered the classroom in a hyperactive state. She showed this hyperactivity by constant squirming in her seat, getting up to obtain a new book every three minutes on five separate occasions, and a heightened awareness to stimuli around her.

One student, Tony, was sleeping during class on some occasions. Sleep was a difficult challenge to overcome for him on some occasions. Tony told me he regulary went to bed around 2:00 in the morning. Additionally, Kevin would constantly fight sleep from overtaking him.

This researcher believes students fail to become actively involved in the story they are reading. The lower proficiency the reader, the more apparent this behavior

becomes. Reading requires transacting with the text. Many of the students with learning disabilities are not used to reading silently by themselves for any period of time.

Overall, reading disengagement behaviors were less frequent than reading engagement behaviors. This demonstrates that this curriculum will foster silent reading, analytical phonics, and writing in response to selected vocabulary words.

Interaction Behaviors

This curriculum requires interaction. Interaction must occur between students and between the teacher and students. This researcher believes much positive interaction was present throughout the observational period. Very few cases of negative interaction took place.

Some students were anxious to arrive at class to begin their reading. During many of the observations periods, Molly, Diane, Steve, and Erica would arrive quickly and begin their silent reading tasks.

Sometimes, the little interactions between student and teacher make a difference. Steve would frequently seek out this researcher's opinion on a subject. Joe, a reluctant reader, stated his opinion that he wanted to be a policeman one day and asked if I had any police stories. Frequent praise by this researcher empowered the students to do their best job. Praising the students for reading well and filling out their reading logs was demonstrated on many occasions.

Most of the interactions between student and teacher happen during the phonics study section of the lesson. Demonstrations of how to build words using the letter cluster were frequent.

The shared response for the phonics study section of the lesson enabled the students to provide each other feedback on their progress. Steve, Kevin, Molly, Diane,

George, and Tommy volunteered to read repeatedly and sought feedback. Joe wanted my opinion on a piece he wrote after sharing.

Spontaneous discussions arose over new books. Kevin would always ask if this researcher had any new books to discover and enjoy.

While constructing the class chart during phonics study, most of the students continually volunteered and sought validation of their words. For example, during most observation periods, eight students were volunteering enthusiastically.

Sometimes the students would be open to teasing their peers about various things. The school setting is a microcosm of society and this good-natured ribbing is appropriate in an open and free classroom. Diane, Molly, Steve, Randy, George, and Michael took part in teasing each other daily. Most of the time, the teasing concerned their written responses to the class chart constructed during the phonics study portion of the lesson.

Lively discussions took place sometimes. During the fourth observation period, the class discussion was lively and humorous. This holistic curriculum encourages students to become learners and interact in the classroom in positive ways.

Leaving the classroom to accomplish a task is something most teachers would not dare to do. This researcher is confident in the seventh grade students' ability to remain on task during his absence. During observation period three, four, and seven, I left the room for an errand to the office. When I returned all students were engaged in silent reading.

Interactions occur constantly in the Achieve reading curriculum. While most of them are positive, there are some negative interactions that occur.

Almost daily, two to three interruptions occurred by announcements over the school public address system. All of my students consistently returned to their work when the announcements were finished. No redirection of behavior was needed.

However, some students infrequently required redirection to class activities. George needed redirection on five different instances. Additionally, Randy required task reminders after 15 to 20 minutes work on three occasions.

Interaction is a necessary component of the "Achieve" reading curriculum. Much is positive and strives to motivate the student to take part in active rather than passive learning.

Reading Skill Demonstrating Behavior

An integral part of the "Achieve" reading curriculum is when teacher and student discuss books they are reading. The learning is transactional. The teacher transacts with the student to discover if the student understands the book the student is reading. A skill is the focus of the silent reading portion of the lesson. Throughout the observational period for this study, the skills being addressed were summary, prediction, character analysis, and plot. Depending on the day, each student would discuss various things about the summary, prediction, characters, or plot from his or her reading.

Students typically understand reading skills when they are addressed in a book the student is reading (Sargent, 1998). This researcher sought to determine if students would be able to answer questions concerning the skill during individual and group conferences addressing the skill in question.

During the first observation period, individual conferences were conducted on a summary of the student's book. George discussed with the researcher a comprehensive summary of the Goosebumps book he had been reading. Additionally, Steve, Randy and Diane provided excellent oral summaries of their reading.

Similar discussions and results occurred during a group sharing activity conducted during observation period six of the study.

Characters and their influence on story development was a favorite discussion topic for a group share activity during several observation periods. Molly, Jennifer, George, and Tommy correctly describe their character's physical appearance, emotional state, and important contributions to the story.

Individual conferences concerning character analysis occurred during observation period three. All four students interviewed correctly described various facets of a character form their story.

This researcher believes in a focus for each lesson, but will not inhibit a student from discussing more if the student wishes too. Molly was an example of this. She is a student in love with mysteries. She demonstrated a excellent memory for the details of her story and correctly gave a fact and opinion during one of our individual conferences.

The plot of the story was discussed throughout individual conferences conducted during observation period six. Diane correctly identified the main problem and solution from her book. Steve recognized the plot and also asked how to pronounce several words. We discussed strategies he could use to pronounce the word and he pronounced the words correctly.

Individual interviews on prediction were conducted during observation period nine. Molly, George, Kevin, and Tommy provided the researcher with predictions consistent with the story being discussed. Joe stated that he was tired and didn't care what happened next.

All students were able to provide this researcher with a summary of their reading for the day by the end of the observations.

Molly, Diane, George, Kevin, Tommy, and Randy were the most proficient. Additionally, these students were able to provide many details from their daily reading on a consistent basis.

Some students needed teacher prompting to answer oral questions concerning their reading selection. Joe, Doug, and Jennifer frequently provided information from their reading selections only in response to questions posed by the teacher.

Reading skills are difficult to measure in a holistic curriculum. This researcher attempted to measure them by interpreting students' response to questions posed during individual conferences.

While some students experienced initial difficulty and confusion, all were able to provide some basic information about the summary, characters, plot and prediction of events to come by the end of their individual conference during observation period ten.

Students Written Responses to the Class Chart

After the class chart was constructed during the phonics study section of the lesson, students were required to write a response to the chart using one or more of the words discussed in constructing the chart. The students were encouraged by the researcher to be creative in this assignment.

If the students correctly used words in their writing from the class chart, this researcher believes it demonstrates an understanding of the word. For nine of the ten observational periods, the students were required to provide a written response.

The construction of the class chart during the phonics study portion of the lesson generated masny different and interesting words. These words served as a basis for the students to write with. Each student is viewed as a writer and as capable to determine his or her response to the chart.

However, like any classroom, varying levels of writing ability were present. Therefore, this researcher was concerned with developing each student's ability to grow and become more comfortable with our written language.

The range of words selected by the students as they composed a response to the phonics study chart varied tremendously. Joe, a developing writer often chose words with one or two syllables in constructing his simple sentence responses. Some interesting words used correctly by Joe were antique, microwave, multimillionaire, and commissioned officer.

Jennifer, Molly, and Diane wrote multi-paragraph responses to the charts. Jennifer started her responses with a working definition of each word and developed a story from the definition. Molly chose to use as many words as possible in a vignette about some current event in her life. Diane usually developed a story about her family. Some of the interesting words chosen by this group include: gastropod, Astroturf, decadence, complimentary, and air compressor.

Steve is a student with severe reading disabilities. Despite his disabilities, he always wrote an imaginative and interesting response to the class chart. Steve generates short stories that are several paragraphs long. He uses words many of the words other students stay away from. For example he used the following words during the observation period in his writings: minuscule, devastation, polygraph, and polyandry.

Randy, Doug, Kevin George, and Tommy wrote responses that could be termed typical for adolescent boys. Most of their responses concerned sports, games, after school activities and racing cars. Interesting words used were: musket, astrodome, outspoken, multimillionaire, decade, and decadence.

While clear differences existed in writing ability, the overall picture emerging from the data is one of a classroom of readers and writers. In this classroom, each student transacts with the reading and the chart to make a written response with self-selected words to demonstrate his or her knowledge of the words that were discussed for that day's activity. This researcher believes that each of us construct our word meanings. Through class discussion, writing, and sharing our use of words is made easier.

CHAPTER FIVE

Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this case study was to answer the following question: Will the "Achieve" reading curriculum increase the reading achievement in a selected seventh grade special education classroom in a 6-8 middle school in northwestern Louisiana?

This researcher believes the data presented shows this curriculum increases the reading achievement of middle school students with learning disabilities in one classroom in northwestern Louisiana. The six themes discussed in chapter four enable one to reach this conclusion.

This researcher will examine the six themes discussed in chapter four and discuss why a conclusion can be reached stating this curriculum is an effective method for increasing reading achievement. First, the method of this holistic curriculum had a definite influence on the participants. In this curriculum the participant was allowed to take part in a transactional learning environment. Each learner constructed meaning from his or her interaction with the books he or she chose to read.

Second, this curriculum facilitated reading engagement behaviors. Every learner was allowed to select reading materials that were comfortable for him or her. Additionally, during the phonics study section of the lesson, each responded to words in their own way. This researcher strongly believes that when learners are allowed to select reading material of interest to them they will be engaged more in what they do. The data seem to support this.

Third, despite each learner being able to construct her own learning, some reading disengagement behaviors were present.

This researcher believes that given enough time and the freedom inherent in this curriculum, the reading disengagement behaviors demonstrated by a few of the learners would gradually extinguish. Many students, especially students with learning disabilities, become discouraged with the reading process at an early age and are not familiar with a holistic approach like this (Weaver, 1994).

Fourth, this is a holistic and transactional curriculum. It forced and encouraged interactions between the learners involved. From the simple to the more complex, interaction was required every day and was an integral part of this approach.

Fifth, because students are allowed to select reading material on their reading level, answering various skill questions was enhanced. This researcher asserts that learning to read is like learning how to ride a bike. One first starts with training wheels before one attempts to ride a mountain bike. Likewise, in learning to answer reading skill questions, learners begin with material they can understand. Once mastered, they progress and begin to challenge themselves more.

Sixth, writing is an integral part of learning to read (Weaver, 1994). During the phonics study section of the lesson, students were encouraged to be creative and to take risks with words. The data clearly indicated that students took risks with words. Additionally, while not all words discussed were used correctly, students were exposed to a plethora of words weekly from which their vocabularies were built and expanded.

Reading achievement, as defined in this study, is a construct consisting of subjective observations of word attack skills, comprehension, oral reading fluency, and silent sustained reading. The six themes emerging from the data analysis clearly indicated that this curriculum increases the reading achievement of students.

Implications for Practice and Further Research

Recent research into reading instructional processes for middle school special education students has advocated a systematic phonics approach (Adams, 1990). Indeed, most special education teachers remain convinced that a "skills only" approach is the best and only way to instruct special education students.

This researcher believes that a constructivist approach is more suitable. The "Achieve" reading curriculum is based on constructivist principles. While this qualitative study only examined one classroom, the "Achieve" reading curriculum fostered various reading behaviors and processes that enhanced the reading experience for middle school students with learning disabilities.

This intrinsic case study is the first step in qualitatively examining on a larger scale and during a longer time frame this curriculum. Additionally, all holistic curriculums based on constructivist principles need to be examined. Furthermore, quantitative studies using causal comparative or quasi-experimental methodology would be useful in examining this approach.

Teachers of middle school students with learning disabilities should realize that a "skills only" synthetic phonetic methodology of reading instruction is not the only way to teach students with learning disabilities. Teachers promoting a skills only approach should be open to new paradigms. They should seek new and effective ways to motivate reluctant readers. Failure to "step out of the box" and try to understand reading from a middle school student with learning disabilities perspective guarantees continued failure in reading instructional practices.

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APPENDIX A

The Achieve Reading Curriculum

The Achieve Reading Curriculum for Middle School At Risk and Special Education Students

John Sargent

3rd Edition - August 2000

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The Achieve Reading Curriculum for Middle School At Risk and Special Education Students

The *Achieve Reading Curriculum* consists of 180 lesson plans. Each lesson consists of two separate areas that allow the teacher to tailor the curriculum to the needs of the students. Even though this is a reading curriculum, each lesson emphasizes the four language arts: reading, writing, speaking and listening.

The students practice reading every day by selecting books interesting to them. Writing practice is achieved by responding to the phonics fun part of the lesson in a creative way using their imaginations. Speaking is utilized by sharing their written responses to the phonics fun lesson and listening is accomplished by attending to their classmates reading and writing.

I will explain each section and the unique structure and flexibility that is present in this curriculum. The time allotted for each section is variable and can be adjusted to meet scheduling demands.

Every fourth week the students read aloud a story selected together by the teacher and students. The story can be a popular tradebook, part of an anthology of short stories, a book of poems, or any other interesting reading selected by the teacher.

Reading Lesson Plans

The reading lesson plans are divided into two parts: *phonics study* and *mastery reading*. Each part of the reading lesson complements the other.

Phonics Study - 30 Minutes

The first part of the reading lesson plan is called phonics study. This section allows the teacher and the students to have fun with words.

To begin this part of the daily reading lesson, the teacher introduces a specific letter cluster for the day that represents a two or three or more letter combination that is very common in the English language.

After the cluster is introduced, the students using a resource such as a newspaper, dictionary, textbook, or anything deemed appropriate, search for words that contain the letter combination. Each student selects words from their reference that contain the sound cluster and they find interesting and perhaps want to discuss more. This searching should take no more than five minutes.

Next, the teacher and students develop a class chart of the most interesting words discovered. The teacher discusses various things about each word (definition, plural form, part of speech, syllables, etc.). The number of words depends on the needs on the class. I've found seven to ten words to be a suitable number for special education students. The teacher is viewed as a professional, able to guide the discussion according to the class requirements.

Additionally, for each phonics study section of the reading lesson, a higher level thinking association is suggested for the student to ponder. For example, if the higher level thinking association for the lesson is automobile, any word that the student could use to make a relationship with the word automobile would be accepted. Words like fender, headlight, horn, blinker, turn signal, chrome, vinyl, paint, and rust are examples of words that correspond to the higher level thinking association of automobile. The students look for these words while searching for words that contain the letter cluster of the day.

Next, each student is asked to write something relating to the words that were selected for the class chart. Students are encouraged to be creative. Some examples of this include: poems, songs, short stories, and sentences.

As the student writes and uses the word correctly, he or she demonstrates an understanding of the word selected.

The charts created by this activity are left on display in the classroom. Many teachers like the ready-made bulletin board that this provides. The number of charts exhibited is left to teacher discretion. While displayed, the charts serve as a review for the words and a ready-made resource that students can use in classroom writing activities.

As the final part of this section of the reading lesson, students select three to four words and learn how to spell them for the day. After studying them, the student selects a partner and they test each other. This is not accomplished for a grade in the usual sense, but merely serves as a motivational tool for the student.

I allow the students to tally the number of words spelled correctly, either orally or written, and put the number of points at the top of the page. For example, if the student spells the word "achieve" correctly they would earn seven points. One point earned for each letter of the word. Only the words spelled correctly earn points.

If time permits, I allow the students to share their written associations to the chart. This can be either in paired groups or whole class sharing.

This curriculum uses every fifth class period as a chart review day. Many activities could be conducted utilizing charts that were prepared on the previous four days.

Some teachers might choose to conduct a "spelling test" for the week using student-selected words from the charts. Students could select eight to ten words on a Thursday from phonics study lessons. They would study those words on Thursday night and the teacher would conduct a "spelling test" on Friday.

Remember that the curriculum is designed to adapt to the needs of the students.

Phonics study should be fast paced. During each lesson the teacher is free to spend more or less time on each part of the section as the need of the class dictates. Flexibility is the key.

Mastery Reading - 30 minutes

The next part of the reading lesson is called Mastery Reading. This section permits each student to choose the books they enjoy. *Achieve* teaches the necessary reading skills through books students choose. As the students are reading, the teacher is holding individual or group conferences on a comprehension/skill focus for the day.

In the beginning of the year the teacher must focus the students into the 20 - 30 minutes of mastery reading time. Very few special education students can read for a sustained 20 minutes at the beginning of the year. As a way of monitoring, each student is required to keep a reading log each day to record the number of books read.

The final part of this section is sharing or read aloud time. I recommend the teacher allow a sharing of interesting things students have read for that day, or read a book to them to model and reinforce good oral reading.

Every Fourth Week - Literature Study

Every fourth week, the class and teacher select a book or other literature selection to read together. This sharing and reading time enables the teacher to gain a first hand knowledge of the students' oral reading fluency. Additionally, the class explores the literature selection under the teacher's careful guidance and together cover concepts that may have been missed in the students' everyday individual reading selections.

During this literature study week the normal phonics study and mastery reading sections of the lessons are not accomplished. The full attention of the class is on the literature selection being studied as a group.

Assessment.

This is a curriculum based on holistic language principles. No formal tests are recommended. The teacher is free to assess his or her students using many items from the curriculum. Such items include but are not limited to: portfolios, daily writings, observations, projects, checklist of skills, informal reading inventories, and self-analysis. I use "reading contract" to arrive at a numerical grade for each week during a marking period. The grade for the marking period is determined by averaging the weekly "reading contract" grades. An example a reading contract is attached.

The teacher is viewed as the person that knows the student the best and is considered to be a professional, willing and able to use all inputs in forming an assessment of a student's progress.

The Curriculum

The procedure to be followed in all of the lessons is the same. Therefore, I've included a lesson plan template that the teacher can use in planning each day's lesson. While the phonics/spelling emphasis, the other association, the resource used, and the comprehension/skill focus are different each day, the basic structure of the lesson remains the same. All the teacher needs to do is substitute the phonics/spelling emphasis, the other association, the resource used, and the comprehension/skill focus each day in the lesson template and a ready made lesson plan is the result.

Every fifth lesson is a chart review day in the phonics fun section and an optional oral practice reading day in the mastery reading section. Consequently, I've included "fifth day template" to use if the teacher wishes.

Once a month (every fourth week) is designated a literature study week. A general lesson plan format is also provided for the literature study week.

Suggestions for Further Reading

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Reading Lesson Emphases

	Phonics/Spelling	***Association***	***Resource***	***Comprehension/Skill***
1.	consonants	beginning school	dictionaries	main idea
2.	vowels	school words	newspapers	details
3.	ch	school uniforms	dictionaries	prediction
4.	sh	school subjects	newspapers	events
5.	*chart review day*		*previous charts*	*oral reading*
6.	th(voiced)	emotions	personal thoughts	cause and effect
7.	th(unvoiced)	classroom	classroom	cause and effect
8.	wh	nouns	dictionaries	comparison
9.	br	proper names	newspapers	sequence
10.	*chart review day*		*previous charts*	*oral reading*
11.	u	writing	dictionaries	characters
12.	dr	calendar	dictionaries	characters
13.	fr	action words	newspapers	details
14.	gr	earth	newspapers	details
15.	*chart review day*		*previous charts*	*oral reading*
16.				
17.	*LITERATURE*	*STUDY*	*WEEK*	
18.		*(LESSONS 16 - 20)*		
19.				
20.				
21.	pr	animals	newspapers	cause and effect
22.	tr	fantasy	dictionaries	facts
23.	bl	people	newspapers	decoding
24.	cl	writing	dictionaries	decoding
25.	*chart review day*		*previous charts*	*oral reading*
26.	fl	weather	science textbook	decoding
27.	gl	travel	newspapers	decoding
28.	pl	music	dictionaries	decoding
29.	sl	accidents	newspapers	main idea
30.	*chart review day*		*previous charts*	*oral reading*
31.	sc	adversity	dictionaries	compare and contrast
32.	sk	senses	dictionaries	compare and contrast
33.	sm	politics	newspapers	main idea
34.	sn	movies	newspapers	facts
35.	*chart review day*		*previous charts*	*oral reading*
36.				
37.	*LITERATURE*	*STUDY*	*WEEK*	
38.		(LESSONS 36-40)		
39.				
40.				

Reading Lesson Emphases(cont.)

	Phonics/Spelling	Association	Resource	Comprehension/Skill
41.	sp	weapons	magazines	facts
42.	st	energy	any textbook	facts
43.	sw	2 syllables	newspapers	opinion
44.	scr	movies	newspapers	opinion
45.	*chart review day*		*previous charts*	*oral reading*
46.	squ	theater	dictionaries	point of view
47.	str	crime	newspapers	word meaning
48.	thr	aviation	newspapers	word meaning
49.	spr	freedom	any textbook	word meaning
50.	*chart review day*		*previous charts*	*oral reading*
51.	shr	taxes	dictionaries	inference
52.	sch	careers	magazines	inference
53.	tw	music	newspapers	inference
54.	gn,kn,wr	medicine	dictionaries	inference
55.	*chart review day*		*previous charts*	*oral reading*
56.				
57.		*LITERATURE*	*STUDY*	*WEEK*
58.		(LESSONS 56 – 60)		
59.				
60.				
61.	er	disease	newspapers	prediction
62.	ir	poverty	newspapers	prediction
63.	ur	wealth	newspapers	prediction
64.	ing	literature	newspapers	prediction
65.	*chart review day*		*previous charts*	*oral reading*
66.	less	geography	dictionaries	author's point of view
67.	ed	love	dictionaries	author's point of view
68.	ar	furniture	dictionaries	author's point of view
69.	or	seasons	newspapers	author's point of view
70.	*chart review day*		*previous charts*	*oral reading*
71.	dge	math	math textbook	main idea
72.	igh	entertainment	newspapers	main idea
73.	tch	failure	dictionaries	main idea
74.	ou	strength	newspapers	main idea
75.	*chart review day*		*previous charts*	*oral reading*
76.				
77.		*LITERATURE*	*STUDY*	*WEEK*
78.		(LESSONS 76-80)		
79.				
80.				

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Reading Lesson Emphases(cont.)

	Phonics/Spelling	***Association***	***Resource***	***Comprehension/Skill***
81.	ow	basketball	dictionaries	details
82.	oi	football	newspapers	details
83.	ou	coaches	newspapers	details
84.	ai	fouls	dictionaries	details
85.	*chart review day*		*previous charts*	*oral reading*
86.	ay	synonyms	dictionaries	cause and effect
87.	ea	synonyms	dictionaries	cause and effect
88.	2 syllable	synonyms	dictionaries	cause and effect
89.	3 syllable	synonyms	dictionaries	cause and effect
90.	*chart review day*		*previous charts*	*oral reading*
91.	ei	anger	newspapers	summary
92.	ey	hobbies	newspapers	summary
93.	ie	synonyms	dictionaries	summary
94.	au	synonyms	newspapers	summary
95.	*chart review day*		*previous charts*	*oral reading*
96.				
97.		*LITERATURE*	*STUDY*	*WEEK*
98.		(LESSONS 96-100)		
99.				
100.				
101.	aw	mail	newspapers	decoding
102.	ew	forests	newspapers	decoding
103.	ful	food	newspapers	decoding
104.	ness	home	newspapers	decoding
105.	*chart review day*		*previous charts*	*oral reading*
106.	er, est	conversation	newspapers	summary
107.	over	homonyms	dictionaries	summary
108.	pre	homonyms	dictionaries	summary
109.	under	homonyms	newspapers	summary
110.	*chart review day*		*previous charts*	*oral reading*
111.	3 syllable	antonyms	dictionaries	facts vs. opinions
112.	tion	antonyms	dictionaries	facts vs. opinions
113.	sion	antonyms	dictionaries	facts vs. opinions
114.	ture	antonyms	dictionaries	facts vs. opinions
115.	*chart review day*		*previous charts*	*oral reading*
116.				
117.		*LITERATURE*	*STUDY*	*WEEK*
118.		(LESSONS 116-120)		
119.				
120.				

Reading Lesson Emphases(cont.)

	Phonics/Spelling	***Association***	***Resource***	***Comprehension/Skill***
121.	dis	compound words	newspapers	prediction
122.	im	compound words	newspapers	prediction
123.	in	compound words	newspapers	prediction
124.	un	compund words	newspapers	prediction
125.	*chart review day*		*previous charts*	*oral reading*
126.	cious	2 syllable words	dictionaries	main idea
127.	tious	2 syllable words	dictionaries	main idea
128.	en	3 syllable words	newspapers	main idea
129.	ish	3 syllable words	newspapers	main idea
130.	*chart review day*		*previous charts*	*oral reading*
131.	4 syllable	body	dictionaries	summary
132.	ist	breakfast	student choice	summary
133.	ous	lunch	newspapers	summary
134.	ice	safety	newspapers	summary
135.	*chart review day*		*previous charts*	*oral reading*
136.				
137.		*LITERATURE*	*STUDY*	*WEEK*
138.		(LESSONS 136-140)		
139,				
140.				
141.	ile	snack foods	newspapers	drawing conclusions
142.	ine	recipes	newspapers	drawing conclus43.mono
144.	bi	candy	newspapers	drawing conclusions
145.	*chart review day*		*previous charts*	*oral reading*
146.	tri	future	magazines	main idea
147.	quad	computers	newspapers	main idea
148.	4 syllable	advertisements	newspapers	main idea
149.	pent	persuasion	newspapers	main idea
150.	*chart review day*		*previous charts*	*oral reading*
151.	eigh	time	dictionaries	characters
152.	amphi	war	dictionaries	characters
153.	ante	nutrition	dictionaries	characters
154.	anti	colors	newspapers	characters
155.	*chart review day*		*previous charts*	*oral reading*
156.				
157.		*LITERATURE*	*STUDY*	*WEEK*
158.		(LESSONS 156-160)		
159.				
160.				

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Reading Lesson Emphases(cont.)

	Phonics/Spelling	***Association***	***Resource***	***Comprehension/Skill***
161.	astro	the past	newspapers	summary
162.	bio	geography	newspapers	summary
163.	com	action words	newspapers	summary
164.	'contra	3 syllable words	newspapers	summary
165.	*chart review day*		*previous charts*	*oral reading*
166.	inter/intra	current events	newspapers	plot
167.	micro/mini	plot	dictionaries	plot
168.	multi	prefixes	dictionaries	plot
169.	poly	prefixes	dictionaries	plot
170.	*chart review day*		*previous charts*	*oral reading*
171.	re/retroprefixes		dictionaries	main idea
172.	trans	prefixes	dictionaries	main idea
173.	y	suffixes	newspapers	main idea
174.	able	suffixes	newspapers	main diea
175.	*chart review day*		*previous charts*	*oral reading*
176				
177.	LITERATURE		STUDY	WEEK
178.	(LESSONS 176-180).			
179.				
180.				